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ABSTRACT

This paper examines efforts to save rapidly declining indigenous languages around the world. The entire process of language preservation and revitalization is a massive undertaking that requires immense long-term planning and support. These problems extend well beyond the linguistic concerns of the language itself. Language policy is inherently political in nature, pitting different linguistic (but also ethnic, religious, or cultural) groups against one another, any or all of whom may have reason to try to undermine any policy. This paper centers on these two distinct yet inter-related concerns in language revitalization efforts: directionality and policy preservation. The problem of directionality of language policy, the direction from which policy is generated and implemented, namely, top-down (government-imposed) or bottom-up (grassroots public-imposed) is unavoidable. It is argued that neither approach can be entirely successful without the other and that the present societal structure where the language is to be used must be considered. The second problem, the question of how to preserve policy over time and through changes in government and leadership once a language policy has been agreed upon and is being implemented, is equally essential. Five suggestions are offered for preserving existing policy, while at the same time allowing the policy to grow and develop. Current research on this subject is reviewed. (Contains 11 references.) (Author/KFT)

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Introduction

In 1992, Language (vol.68 no.1) carried several articles on the subject of the rapid decline of many of the world's indigenous languages. That a collection on a subject so practical was highlighted in the pre-emanate theoretical journal of our discipline was in itself somewhat astonishing, and was seen by many to be a call to arms.

By approaching this alarming decline, Language brought this issue to many linguists not formally trained in the issues of language planning and preservation. That issue carried articles by Hale, Krauss, and others, and resonated into subsequent discussion and rebuttals in later issues (see for example Ladefoged 1992, and Dorian 1993). The fact that people were then, and still are now, talking about the subject of language preservation suggests that there is indeed valid concern for the deteriorating state of many of the world's languages. The subject has expanded even further, now into the mainstream press, in magazines such as Civilization (Crystal 1997) and Time (Geary 1997), further highlighting the need and efforts to save smaller languages and the cultures that go with them. Within many of the societies where language use and transmission may vary from wide use to none, efforts are already underway to slow the further decline of the language. Yet, the entire process of language preservation and revitalization is a massive undertaking, one which requires immense long-term planning, support from those concerned, and sometimes even luck, if the policy, any policy, is to find success. The problems and difficulties in language planning go beyond simply linguistic concerns of the language itself. Many, if not most of these problems are also political in nature, pitting different linguistic (but also ethnic, religious, or cultural) groups against one another, and pulling away at any policy.

This paper sets out to consider two fundamental problems of language policy: first, the problem of the directionality of language policy; and second, once a policy has been agreed upon and is being implemented, how to preserve that policy over time and through

the change of government and leadership. The paper will therefore be divided into two parts and each of these problems will be examined separately.

The Directionality of Language Policy

The question of directionality, or of which direction language policy should take, is often one which is taken for granted. Traditionally, there have been distinct and separate directions that have been discussed in policy formation of all kinds. Among the most basic are the top-down and bottom-up approaches.

The Top-down Approach

The top-down form of policy implementation involves policy formation and execution conducted by and through the government. The government creates the policy, funds it, monitors it, with or without the approval of its citizens. This form of language planning is in effect in many parts of the world, in situations where the language is endangered or perceived to be threatened (e.g. Quebec, Wales), and also in vibrant language communities often in the form of language academies (e.g. The Academie Francaise).

The top-down form of language planning is also that experienced throughout history under colonial powers where the colonizer designates the language to be used in the schools, government, and so forth (most commonly the colonial language). We need to look no farther than Africa to see the remnants of colonial language policy ; with French, for example, remaining a prominent, if not official, language in more than a dozen of its former colonies including Algeria, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and so on. This is, of course, also how many French words came into English, a result of the occupation and subsequent mandating of French in the government and other domains during the 11th century and onward. The enforcement of the Japanese language in schools in Taiwan and other Pacific areas during the 30's and early 40's is another case.

Similarly, the pressing of a national language (to the neglect of other languages) creates a de facto top-down language policy. French use in Breton, Basque, and Alsatian areas demonstrates the point (see Kaplan, 1998). The current top-down policy in Japan while facilitating some facets of the Japanese language (i.e. reduction of the Joyo kanji to 1,945), has at the same time all but eliminated Ainu. The Ryukuan languages have faired only slightly better.

Governments in cases such as those set out about above frequently will take one of two

positions; linguistic assimilation or linguistic pluralism. As Lodge (1993: 23) remarks, linguistic assimilation occurs when "all languages other than that of the state are marked out for suppression." Clearly, the policies of the French and Japanese fit into this form of policy-making.

The alternative is linguistic pluralism. Lodge defines linguistic pluralism as when "Two or more languages can be given 'official status', as in Belgium (with French in Wallonie and Dutch in Flanders)..." Other examples of such a policy include Switzerland, Singapore, and in Hawaii. With linguistic pluralism the official status can do much to assist in preservation. Often such recognition can bring greater access to government resources. Yet, in some cases the official recognition may be nothing more than window-dressing, where the ruling power will (regardless of policy) still favor one language over the others.

Before turning to the bottom-up approach, it is important to take a moment to look at the potential benefits and problems of the top-down approach, as they pertain to the revitalization of indigenous languages.

As noted above, the top-down approach is government-implemented and maintained. The benefits to such an approach are evident. In practical terms, it is the government that often controls the resources, in other words, the money. The revitalization effort goes far beyond telling people to use language X instead of language Y. It involves considerable time and effort, the production of materials in language X, the hiring of teachers of X, and so forth, all of which cost money. Rarely does the community itself, alone, have the resources to fund such a long-term endeavor.

A second benefit of this approach is that within the government there is already an established network of people involved in other forms of policy making which could facilitate the formation of policy and the diffusion of that policy (e.g., to the schools, media, etc.). Similarly, and I suspect many governments would argue this, it is easier to work through the government than against it, or without it.

While the benefits noted above all seem to be viable concerns, these very benefits contribute to problems of their own. First, he who controls the money frequently makes the decisions. To elaborate, if the government is to be involved in the language policy the government is then going to make its own decisions. These decisions may have considered the community and may have sought input from that community. Yet, frequently the interests are of the government (or the group in power at the time) and not of the speakers of the minority language. This may mean the government, while supporting the minority

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language, may argue that it is in the best interest of the community to learn the majority language, lingua franca, or the world language. The government may not have the money or the interest to support every language. It may even favor one language over another, and may view a one-language policy as a way of maintaining control through linguistic unity.

The second benefit I noted above was that the government has an established network. While this is true, one must recognize that governments are bureaucracies which may move too slowly to really be effective.

The government itself may change directions with a change of leadership and that in itself can be devastating to the revitalization effort. The subsequent government may be of a different language, different political bend, or may simply take a different position on the use of minority languages. The withstanding of such change is the topic of the second part of this paper and will be examined in greater depth there.

Finally, even if the government has the best of intentions, without the support and willingness of the users of the language, any such policy is destined to fail. This idea is set out well by Dagut (1985 : 73) who notes," ...a language revival cannot be imposed from above on a speech community by far-seeing planners, but must grow organically from below, in response to a deeply and widely felt socio-cultural need." Dagut goes on to point out that a top-down policy without bottom-up support is "putting the cart before the horse" (73).

The Bottom-up Approach

The second option set out at the onset of this section is the bottom-up approach. In this form of language planning, it is the community of speakers of a given language who determine the route to revitalization, rather than the government. All aspects of the planning and implementation are determined at the community level, with or without the support of the government. This form of policy is also in effect in many places in the world, particularly in colonial settings where the minority, and even sometimes the majority language is frowned upon by those in power. It may also be in use in areas of multilingualism where the government may be responsible for as many as 100 different languages or more (e.g. Papua New Guinea, the Phillipines, Russia) and where a lack of resources or interest results in many linguistic communities being left to fend for themselves. It is this latter option that Fishman (1991 : 395) argues for all linguistic revitalization efforts.

The bottom-up approach is community-based. All aspects of planning and implementation are conducted within the community that uses the language. Therefore, the first benefit can be seen as an issue of who controls the policy. In the case of this approach it is the users of the language.

A second benefit of the bottom-up approach is that because the community makes the decisions, the speakers of the language will take a greater role in the execution of the policies. This may include assisting in the production of materials, teaching in the schools, and using the language in the home. Moreover, those taking part in the process are more likely to work hard to see that the policy succeeds as compared with a policy of the government.

While the bottom-up approach is more of a hands-on approach it too has problems. The first is organization. The organization of both the policy and of those people who are to take part in the discussion and planning of that policy are a great undertaking. Logistically, the planning is quite difficult, particularly without outside help.

A further problem is the question of money. Few people want to work for purely altruistic reasons. Financial resources are needed in order to create materials for schools, to create dictionaries and grammars, to get the language into the media and into advertising, and so forth. It is very difficult to secure enough financial support without assistance to at least a minimal extent from the government.

An additional problem of this approach is that even within the community itself opinion is rarely uniform and will frequently vary on how to save the language, or whether to save the language at all. The entire process will be political, and often, because the language is in decline, this suggests that there are many who feel there are reasons for not using a given language. These may include, for example, that the speakers of the language see a different language, the lingua franca of the area, or the world language as bringing access to a better life. Therefore, support itself for revitalization may be difficult to secure in the community.

It is evident from an examination of both approaches that each has its benefits, and each its problems. The position that I would like to argue for is that the ideal policy is one which includes as many people as possible. In other words, a policy which involves both the government and the community, yet one which is individualistic according to the needs and governmental structure of the society.

A Multi-directional Approach to Language Planning

As is evident from the above discussion, both the top-down and bottom-up approaches have benefits and hazards to contend with. Of course, each language situation is going to be an individual case, one with its own particularities. Yet, I would like to argue for a multi-directional approach. In this approach, each side would have its own responsibilities. It is perhaps best to look at several possible ways this might take place.

If the society and government utilize the same language, or the same language and a trade or world language, then one is more likely to have success with such a bi-directional approach. In this situation the government can ultimately oversee the educational policy, funding, and the organization of community involvement. The community in turn can foster language use within the community and this may include increased use in the home, production of school materials in the language, the recording of cultural information and stories from the elders, committees for modernization of the lexicon, and so forth. The ideal situation for such an approach would be where both the government and the community recognize a need to preserve the language. A good example of this approach is underway in Hawaii where the government has provided assistance, both financially, and through agencies such as the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and others. It has also recognized the status of the Hawaiian language, making it (along with English) an official language of Hawaii. Similarly, it has on occasion enacted laws to support the use of the language. The law requiring all new street names to be in Hawaiian is a step in the right direction.

The community for its part has generated a committee involved in the modernization of the lexicon, advocates for the use of the Hawaiian language, and even has a traveling theater group promoting the language through performances of Hawaiian stories in the Hawaiian language. In the case of Hawaii, the language of the government is for all practical purposes English, and very few in government speak the Hawaiian language (despite its status as an official language). The policy in such a case, while being clearly bi-directional is not equally bi-directional. The ultimate decision on issues of policy and revitalization must rest within the community. Placing the ultimate power within the government would likely stagnate any fostering of the Hawaiian language.

However, there are many other communities where the approach just noted, namely a bi-directional structure would not work. To offer a second example, one which many communities are faced with, we can look again at the problem of colonialism. In a situation of this type, the government is generally an outside government, one which may

have much less concern for the long-term standing of a minority language (Tahiti and Indonesia for example). Often in these cases, the colonial language is established, widely used in the government and in many public domains, and the minority language is losing out. In such a situation, placing too much trust in the government to save the language is probably not in the best interest of the community. Here again, a bi-directional approach where the community is dominant, and where the government can be used for monetary support, would be more successful. Once again however, the success of the program is dependent upon the ability of the community to organize itself, agree on the measure(s) to be taken and the distribution of power, and it must be prepared for a long-term battle.

As noted earlier in this paper, Fishman (1991 : 395) has argued for a bottom-up approach as the best way to preserve language. Dagut (1985) and Kaplan (1998) have argued similarly for this approach. At first thought, this may seem a likely choice. After all, it is the users of the language who are most responsible for its the preservation or death of a language. Yet, there are far too many different qualifying factors to say that any single uni-directional approach, either top-down or bottom-up, would be successful for all cases. I do not wish to suggest that the bottom-up approach does not work at all. In many cases, particularly those where the language is one of many vying for funds and recognition from the government, or where a colonial government is in place, this would by far be a better choice than the alternatives (i.e., placing one's hope with the government). However, there seems to be a major flaw in the employment universally of Fishman's proposal for all revitalization efforts to be bottom-up. It seems that some consideration must be made to the type of organizational or governmental system in place in the community where preservation is to take place. It seems quite likely that a bottom-up approach would be possible in cases where grass-roots organizational structure is already a way of life for decision-making. This might include minority languages in more or less democratically organized systems such as in Europe (Wales, Breton), parts of the Americas (Quebec, and with Amerindian tribes such as the Warm Springs Indians[1]), and so forth. Yet, what about the more hierarchical systems, those which are decidedly top-down to begin with. In these systems, where for example, all important decisions of the community are dictated to the community through the chiefs there may never have been

1 The Warm Springs Indians, as noted by Phillips (1983), often make decisions on the basis of open meetings.

a decision made by the broader community. Implementing solely a bottom-up approach by the community here may do nothing more than flounder about, infuriating the chiefs, and would just seem unlikely to even happen.

Yet, it may still be possible to salvage Fishman if we consider what might be called a community-based top-down approach. Here then, we must make a further distinction between top-down and bottom-up. Namely, in many linguistic communities in the Pacific, there is a government (usually a western democratic model (e.g., Micronesia, Fiji) or occasionally a monarchy (e.g., Tonga). Yet, at the same time, there is a traditional government in place. This traditional government is generally hierarchical with chiefs leading the communities. The government and the chiefs are frequently not the same people and they do not always agree. As such, a true top-down approach would involve the government, with or without the approval of the chiefs. From within the community, and at that level, if the chiefs were to implement language policy it would still be community level, but would be top-down within the bottom-up approach. By approaching it in this way, the community-based approach to language planning would remain intact, but would allow for the possibility of top-down structuring within the community.

The examples presented above demonstrate the hazards of proposing a sweeping plan that will work for all language communities. It is likely, however, that the best approach is to "get all the help you can get".

Having discussed at some length the type of approach a language community might take in order to formulate policy and to save their language (and with it their culture), we must now consider how to preserve the policy once it is in place.

The Maintenance and Preservation of Language Policy

Upon identifying the approach to take in the formulation of language policy, the language community is confronted with an onslaught of issues regarding the language. What has already been done? What needs to be done? Is there a grammar, a dictionary, an orthography? Are there materials in the language? What are the attitudes of the community regarding their language? What are the attitudes in the government toward the language? Is the language still being used in the home, and is it being transmitted inter-generationally? Is it in use in the schools, the government, the media? Is another local language encroaching on the declining language, or is it a trade or world language? These and a number of other concerns all make the process of planning long-term language care difficult. There are no easy solutions. Yet, once a course of action

has been decided upon it is important to consider how the policy can be maintained through the changing of governments, generations, and even opposition within the community. In this section I would like to consider some planning options for the maintenance and preservation of a policy once it is in place.

Why the Policy Needs to be Preserved

The amount of work required to create a language policy, from the research and groundwork to the diffusion of power and implementation of policy, all point to the importance of preserving the policy. Without some continuity to the policy, however, little if any success can be achieved. New policies will be created and implemented haphazardly with no concern for what has already been done, often by those who may not fully understand the implications of their efforts. Inefficiency on all levels will arise without some maintenance of the policy, of knowing what has been done, what is being done, and what needs to be done. In reality, a solid policy can prevent the re-inventing of the wheel. It is to avoid these inefficiencies and overhauling of policy that makes the preservation of an existing policy important. The following are a number of ideas to assist in the maintenance and preservation of language policy.

1. Diffusion and Decentralization of Power

The distribution of power, from the hands of a few to the hands of many, is the first important consideration regarding the maintenance of policy. The more groups, committees, and domains (e.g., schools, organizations) involved the more difficult it is to break down or dismantle existing policies. This might mean one committee of specialists and citizens works on the lexicon, another committee might work on creating community support for the plan, still another may work on increasing native-language instruction in schools, and yet another may create materials for those schools. Each of these committees has a piece of the pie, but not the whole pie.

It may appear above that the government is not involved in these committee activities. I would like to suggest that the government does have a role to play, but one which will prevent it from changing the policy when those in office are changed. This would entail a de-centralization of policy. In other words, if the government is to be involved then it must be able to uphold the policy regardless of what political or ethnic or linguistic group is in office at any time.

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2. Decentralization through a Bi-lateral Oversight Committee

The second potential way of decentralizing power could involve a bi-lateral oversight committee made up of both government and community members. This could involve a standing committee, one which would have a given number of members, say five members, and would increase by two members per year to a total of nine. The members would be selected from the government and community, at say, a 1 : 5 government to community ratio. This would mean one government-appointed official meeting regularly with say five community members. As cost is always a concern, the community members would likely be volunteers. The community committee members would each serve for a term to be determined within the community, and possibly at staggered intervals, to allow for a level of continuity within the group while permitting fresh ideas from new members of the committee. It would, however, be important for such a committee to be difficult to disband by the new government. A staggering of the introduction of new members, along with government recognition of the committee, could insure this continuity. This committee could oversee many of the areas noted earlier, and could serve as an advisory and overview committee ensuring that the program is successful, distributing funds, serving as a clearinghouse for information, securing grant money, facilitating dialogue between the community and government, and monitoring the progress of increasing use of the native language in areas where use has waned or is non-existent.

While being a government committee, the 1 : 5 ratio gives the community members a majority vote, enough to give a partisan advantage to the community in deciding its own path.

It may seem that the type of policy I am proposing is a rigid one, one that needs to be preserved at all costs. It is however important to note, that as the use of the language changes, and as the needs change, the policy will need to be modified to meet these needs. Similarly, no policy is perfect. Some ideas will work and will be kept, fostered, and proudly displayed as success stories. Others will not. This is the nature of planning. Such a committee would be able work within the policy and modify it as needed. In this sense the committee functions very similar to Congress in the United States. Regardless of which party is in power, the general policy (the laws of the US) remain intact. New laws and changes are enacted as needed yet the general structure of the laws (the basic policy) and their ultimate goals remain firm.

3. The Educational System as a Way of Preserving Policy

Here there are two ways in which education can be used to maintain the language policies of the speech community. The first of these is to get the policy into the schools, beginning with the lowest grades first. The benefits of such a course of action are multifold. First, the fastest way to regaining a base of native speakers in a language is to go for those who can attain language proficiency the fastest, that is through the children. Starting with adults alone, many of whom may understand the language but not speak it, we are essentially building a second language program. Beginning with the children, the policy achieves one of its primary goals: the fostering of the language as a first language.

The second benefit of beginning with the lowest grades first is that it is easiest to prepare materials for classes at these levels, and these materials can be reused, and increased with each new class. This approach also lays a solid foundation for the continued teaching of the language. As the first class moves into a new grade, new materials will of course be required. For the first class entering the program the experience might be a bit rough. But for subsequent classes, with each class the process should get easier. This is what is happening now in the Hawaiian Immersion Programs. They are building the program as the initial classes proceed through school. There are of course problems of securing ample and sufficient materials, but this too will subside with time and effort. Each time a new class enters a given grade level many of the materials from previous classes will have been tried, retained, and improved, and new materials will continually be added. Finally, simply by getting the language into the schools, the community has made a solid step to securing a foothold on the policy. While this may look easy, it is much more complex than this brief discussion. In many cases, it is the Director of Education, often a government-appointed official, who sets the priorities and curriculum of the schools. In many cases then, getting the policy into the schools (which may view another language as the way to a better future) may take considerable effort. In such cases, overhauling one language for another may be too much to expect. Simply getting the language into the schools at all, even for one period to begin, may be a significant step forward, and a precursor to greater access later. It is important to recognize that materials can still be made and set aside for use as the opportunity arises.

Once the language is in the schools, and materials are made, if the program is effective (by effective I mean if the students are not only learning, but also using the language) then it will be difficult to remove the program. Now we turn to the second way education can be used to preserve the language policy.

4. Education of the Community

The second meaning of education here is education of the community. It is rare when every member of a community will agree unanimously on some issue. Language is no exception and people take the issue of language very seriously. It is going to take considerable discussion, the raising of awareness, and publicizing of what is required of everyone in order to preserve and revitalize the language. There will no doubt be those in the community who will see the loss of the language as a necessary evil for economic prosperity (the 'we need English' phenomenon) ; others will argue that their language is old-fashioned, of little value, or stigmatized. The education of the community might involve showing the uniqueness of the language, the history and culture that will be lost if the language ceases to exist, and most importantly, that language preservation and revitalization do not have to mean a return to monolingualism by everyone in the community. It is an unavoidable fact that communication has become easier as a result of the media, satellites, and the Internet, and that English has become the de facto world language. Similarly, trade languages and colonial languages which still carry significant prestige are a way of life and have contributed significantly to the downfall of many languages. However, it is important to note that one does not need to sacrifice one's native language to learn a trade or world language, and that bilingualism is not a bad thing. Bilingualism can bring access to trading partners and to those outside the immediate community, and can foster cultural tolerance and understanding of others. It is only when bilingualism moves to monolingualism favoring the encroaching language that the language begins to decline. Yet, it is important to note that there are many places in the world that have been bi- or multi-lingual for centuries. These include India, Africa, many places in South-East Asia, and communities on virtually every continent. One may ask how such multilingual communities continue to thrive, and the languages in them continue to exist? Often the languages in such communities continue to serve a needed use. One language learned will be a national or regional language of some official status (often taught in the schools frequently as a second or third language and in coordination with a local language), there is also frequently a trade language in place (useful for trading with one's neighbors), and a local language used within the home (or even two if the parents are of differing tribes). Each of these languages serves a particular function in the community, a valued role which continues to warrant their existence. It is clear that bilingualism and multilingualism do not have to equate to language death.

The education of the community may also include encouragement for families to use

the endangered language in the homes, churches, and in other meeting places. The need for education within the community will be as important in the early stages of policy forming and implementation as it will be for the children in the schools.

5. Implementing the Policy as Law

In cases where the government is sympathetic to the status of the language, getting the policy into the law will insure both compliance and longevity with the policy. Often this will fall under the auspices of some form of civil rights legislation, providing for the protection of language and culture in indigenous communities. This may take time and considerable effort as many governments are less than sympathetic to such concerns. Yet, once accomplished, laws (if they are enforced) are binding and as such people are required to adhere to the laws. Here enforcement is a key issue. Again, an oversight committee could assist in ensuring that the government follows through on policy through lobbying efforts and through contact and negotiation with the government.

Furthermore, by placing the policy into law it shows a commitment of the government that something needs to be done. Finally, the law insures longevity in that while it is often difficult to enact a law, it is far easier to enact a law than it is to remove the law once it is in place.

Conclusions

The planning and implementation of a long term policy to save a language is a complex and important one. This paper has sought to consider both approaches to language planning, the top-down and bottom-up approaches. Each has its benefits. Each has its problems. There are no easy solutions. As every language community will be in a slightly different situation with unique individualistic problems, each case must be considered individually. There is a lot to be learned, however, from what others have done. I have argued here that a bi-directional approach, one where help comes from all sides will be the most effective.

In terms of preservation of language policy I have provided five ideas important to the preservation of language policy. These are, (1) the decentralization and diffusion of power, (2) the formation of a decentralized oversight committee, (3) language use and teaching within education implemented from the lower grades upward, (4) education of the community, and (5) making the policy the law. Each of these contributes to the preservation and maintenance of the policy.

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The ultimate goal of this paper is to provide ideas to foster further discussion of these issues and to shed light upon what is ultimately a challenge worth fighting. Language is at the heart of culture, and it is very difficult to have one without the other. The preservation of the language means the preservation of the culture.

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〈SUMMARY〉

This paper centers upon two distinct, yet inter-related concerns in language revitalization efforts. The first problem is that of directionality, or the direction from which language policy is generated and implimented. The traditional notions of top-down (government-imposed) and bottom-up (grass-roots public-imposed) policy implimenation will be considered in the context of individual language situations. Fishman has argued that the most succesful approach to language planning is from the bottom-up. In direct contrast, governmental language policy frequently mandates (by its very nature) a top-down approach. An argument is made in this paper that neither approach, in and of itself, can be entirely succesful without the other and that the present societal structure where the language is to be used must be considered.

Once a language revitalization policy is established the second concern must be the maintenance and preservation of that policy against attempts to destroy that policy. All language policy is political. This section offers five suggestions for preserving the existing policy, while at the same time allowing the policy to grow and develop. As little research currently exists on this part of language planning, this section seeks to offer those at the starting end of language revitalization a view of what can and is being done in other linguistic contexts.